



Success Defined:
Growing Impact
Year After Year



Profile: Capacity-
building Courtesy of
Campus Resources



SNAP: Putting
Healthy Food
Within Reach

VISTA Viewfinder
Issue 15:
November 11, 2008

VISTA: Volunteers In Service To America
Since 1964, 175,000 Strong



VISTA
viewfinder



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SNAPSHOTS

E-mail what you are thankful for to VISTAOutreach@cns.gov. Yours may appear in the Viewfinder.

Learn how to use social media (Facebook, YouTube, etc.): [view here](#)

Save the date:
MLK Day is
January 19, 2009

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For the Hungry: Sustainable Event Supplements VISTA Project

The Destiny Foundation of Central Florida was founded in 2001 as a long-term food subsidy program and has expanded into food security, workforce development, and health education to break the cycle of poverty.

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THE LANDSCAPE



VISTA Campus
now launched!

"V is for ____"



To learn more about
"V is for," visit
www.vistacampus.org

To request a V pin

Save the date:
[AmeriCorps Week](#)
is May 9-16, 2009



VISTAs **Tony Higdon** and **Melissa Carson** are working to make the Destiny Foundation's Thanksgiving Drive larger and more sustainable.

For the past seven years, the organization has spearheaded a community-wide food drive for Thanksgiving. Through careful preparation and learning from their successes and mistakes, the Destiny Foundation has made the annual food drive the centerpiece of their outreach events.

The Thanksgiving Drive is one piece of the Destiny Foundation's VISTA project and individual VISTA assignments, which include VISTA positions focused on volunteer programs, evaluation, media, development, programming and outreach—but the Drive supplements every area of work. It increases awareness, which builds the donor and volunteer base throughout the year and helps to bring new clients into its programs. With more resources and volunteers, the Destiny Foundation is able to expand its programming in food security, workforce development, health education and other social services—thus working to break the long-term cycle of poverty through resources, education and support.

VISTA Tony Higdon and the organization's president and founder, Scott George, took time out of their Thanksgiving drive preparations to give insight into what makes their food drive so successful:

Viewfinder:	How does the Thanksgiving drive fit into the Destiny Foundation's mission?
Tony:	The Food Drive has become such a tradition in the Orlando area that schools and agencies that participate and individuals who benefit from the meals begin to anticipate the event months in advance. With the number of individuals we serve increasing and funding for services like ours declining, it is more important now than ever to be able to offer nourishment to those in our community

(limit one per VISTA),
e-mail your name
and address to
VISTAOutreach@cns.gov

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V Cafe Question
of the Month:
What opportunities and
successes have you
had in connecting to
and leveraging
community leaders?
[answer now](#)

VISTA on MySpace:
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FAQ

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	who may otherwise not have much for a traditional Thanksgiving meal.
Scott:	We all rally when it comes to Thanksgiving because it's about food, and our core mission is to help with food. It exposes us to potential corporate and individual donors and volunteer groups. It opens up a lot of opportunities that last throughout the year. It's great for Thanksgiving and is much, much needed, but it also gives people a window into our organization to help out during the year.
Viewfinder:	How does the Thanksgiving drive fit into the larger VISTA project?
Scott:	It's a wonderful way for our VISTAs to connect with public schools, churches, and organizations throughout Central Florida. In this economic crisis, many people are in need. For the VISTAs, it connects them with people who are in need.
Viewfinder:	Tony, describe your involvement with this year's event.
Tony:	My assignment in this project is to oversee the planning, preparation and on-site registration for this year's Thanksgiving meals. Melissa Carson, our Research Analyst VISTA, manages our internal client pre-registration, staffs registration tables with volunteers, and assists in maintaining the integrity of our membership data by making sure that each client who registered had a valid membership ID. I've been able to use data from previous years and improve on processes that have allowed us to increase our goal from last year's 5,000 meals to 10,000 this year.
Viewfinder:	What are the VISTAs doing to make this event and this year's growth sustainable?
Tony:	Recordkeeping, logging donations, and creating booklets for processing meals all add to the sustainability of this event. We have partnered with local organizations to coordinate manuals, fliers, diagrams, and

planning schedules to assist future planning committees so that no re-creation of tools should be necessary.

For more information about the Destiny Foundation of Central Florida or its Thanksgiving Food Drive, visit <http://www.battlepoverty.org/>.

Five Tips for Making Events or Drives Sustainable

1. Create manuals, guides and other materials to guide staff and volunteers through the planning and implementation process. These will be used in future years.
2. Recruit and train a group of volunteers to run every aspect of the event and/or drive. Once VISTAs are no longer at the organization, the event will continue through volunteer leadership.
3. Partner with other organizations, businesses, schools, etc. Remember to recognize and send “Thank You’s” to all partners when the event is over. Fond memories will make them want to participate in the future.
4. Articulate how the event or drive fits into the overall mission of the organization. This is useful in recruiting volunteers, interacting with the media and ensuring that the event stays focused.
5. Evaluate the event or drive and document successes and areas for improvement for next year’s staff and volunteers to reference.

Think about who will be doing this next year. In all likelihood, it will be someone other than you, so be sure what you are doing can be replicated! Also, think about ways that your efforts in event planning can boost your VISTA assignment and increase overall capacity in the organization’s fight against poverty.

For more information, visit the [event planning](#) section on the VISTA Campus.

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**Build Your Capacity &
Sustainability:
A VISTA Campus Review**

By Laura Herberg
VISTA, Step by Step
Charleston, WV

Understanding what capacity building and sustainability mean is one thing—actually ensuring them in your work is another. The VISTA Campus has designed a tutorial that will help you to understand what successful capacity building and sustainably look like and to help you start to consider this in terms of your own VISTA assignment.



The tutorial, takes you through three scenarios where you learn about how different VISTAs have their assignments completed. After reading each of these scenarios, you are asked to assess whether or not the VISTA was successful at building capacity. There are multiple choice questions and longer, personal responses.

You type your personal responses in a text box, and press “submit” when you’re finished, as if you’re about to post something on someone’s Facebook wall, which makes me think a little harder about what I was saying (no one wants to post something dumb on someone’s wall). Once you press “submit”, however, the only consequence is that you’re able to compare your own answer to the tutorial’s answer.

After going through this with all three scenarios, you should have a better grasp on some specifics of what kinds of things work and do not work, and make capacity building what you may actually try to do.

You also are asked to take what you’ve learned about capacity building and apply it to your own VISTA position by writing about it in a feature of the VISTA Campus, called the journal.

If you do this every time you complete a VISTA campus tutorial you will not only be able to refer back to your thoughts on capacity building (because this online journal saves all your responses), but on many other topics as well.

Since VISTAs are people who have voluntarily decided to serve a year of their time at home to better their country while gaining invaluable job skills, I can't imagine any of you not wanting to take advantage of this resource to hone your VISTA skills, and in turn make a more lasting difference in other people's lives.

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Ensuring Sustainability: 250 Projects at a Time

When your VISTA Service ends, how will you know if your efforts will be sustained? For that matter, how does VISTA know if the program as a whole is living up to its purpose of building sustainable anti-poverty programs?

Some things, like the number of volunteers recruited or the amount of dollars raised are easy to measure. However, standard measurements in professional research fail to gauge sustainability.

For that reason, VISTA has contracted with Westat, a private survey and analysis firm, to measure just how successful we have been. Westat has selected 250 currently-active projects and 250 projects that have been closed for at least two years for the study. Over the course of the next several months, they will review applications and progress reports from the project sponsors, interview project and State Office staff, and analyze the results. Their work will determine if the efforts of VISTAs at these projects have been or are likely to be sustained, how VISTA has contributed to that sustainability, and what VISTA can do to ensure that we continue to be an effective resource.

The study is scheduled to be complete late next spring. We hope that it will lead to new approaches that VISTA can undertake to ensure that we continue to be an invaluable resource in the fight against poverty.

Please stay tuned to the Viewfinder for the study results next year.

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Food Stamps are “SNAP”



The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. Each month, FSP helps 28 million low-income people put healthy food on the table. As of October 1, 2008, the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

While SNAP is the federal name for the program, State programs may have different names. The new name reflects the changes the USDA made to meet the needs of our clients, including a focus on nutrition.

Program improvements include an increase in the minimum benefit (from \$10 to \$14) and an increase in the standard deduction per household (from \$134 to \$144 in FY 2009). The standard deduction is a fixed dollar amount that is subtracted from a household's income before SNAP benefits are determined. On average, the standard deduction allows for an increase in SNAP benefits per household.

Other program improvements include the elimination of the cap on dependent care deduction (includes child care and elder care) and the exclusion of education and retirement accounts from countable resources. Through nutrition education partners, SNAP helps clients learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices.

For more information about SNAP or one of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services fifteen programs, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov>.

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And the winner of this issue's free VISTA hoodie is...



Derick Bishop
VISTA Leader

Derick, e-mail VISTAOutreach@cns.gov with your address and shirt size, and we'll send you a VISTA hoodie!

VISTAs and alumni, keep posting "V is for" photos and stories to enter the contest. You only have to post once to be eligible for every issue. For more information, visit the [VISTA Campus](#).

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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is the Viewfinder?

A: VISTA means view-looking out on a broad expanse. The viewfinder, a toy that all generations of VISTAs recognize, was a kind of binocular that focused on points of interest, highlights, and snapshots in living color. The VISTA Viewfinder surveys in the landscape and zeroes in on service.

Q. Why the Viewfinder?

A. Here's your direct link to connecting with other VISTAs, learning what they are doing, and helping to spread the message of VISTA and national service!

Q. How can I contribute?

A. Have a story to tell? Submission ideas? Contact vistaoutreach@cns.gov. Use the Viewfinder to highlight your VISTA service and share your experiences with others across the country!

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